

WILLIAM A. LITTLE ORAL HISTORY PROJECT
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INTERVIEWEE: DONALD CLOSE

INTERVIEWERS: WILLIAM LITTLE

SUBJECTS: TYREE SCOTT; BLACK CONSTRUCTION WORKERS; COURT ORDER; APPRENTICESHIP PROGRAMS; ELECTRICIANS; IRONWORKERS; SHEET METAL WORKERS; EXECUTIVE ORDER 11246; EQUAL OPPORTUNITY; AFFIRMATIVE ACTION; ELECTRICIANS JOINT APPRENTICESHIP COMMITTEE; CENTRAL CONTRACTORS ASSOCIATION; UNITED CONSTRUCTION WORKERS ASSOCIATION; DISCRIMINATION; COURT ORDER ADVISORY COMMITTEE; *UNITED STATES V. IRONWORKERS LOCAL 86*; CAL BOULDING; AUSTIN ST. LAURENT; RACISM; GRADUATION RATES; STATE GOVERNMENT; KING COUNTY; ASSOCIATED GENERAL CONTRACTORS

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[00:00:10] **DONALD CLOSE:** I was involved as a part of the negotiating team, in all years, all through the '60's, and all through the '70's I had been on the negotiating committee, and also on the Labor-Management for ASG. Work for the electrical contractors' association as far as the unions were concerned. The reason that I mention that is that the first time the situation arose as far as no Blacks in the industry was right after President Johnson, when he put out [Executive Order] 11246 [Equal Employment Opportunity]. At that point in time, or

within a year of that time, the construction industry, or at least the part that we were involved in had substantial pressure from the awarding agencies and from others that we must comply with 112446. And as a consequence, we started making noises to the unions, look let's get some Blacks in an apprenticeship program. And we were successful negotiating and agreeing with them that they would take in some Blacks. Okay, it took us, just in retrospect, I would guess two or three years before we got the first Black in the program.

Now, I was absolutely astounded. Here was a job that we were making available, that was training a person to become an electrician and to have a good opportunity to make very good wages throughout his life. And when we got this negotiator in the union, our association started seeing if we could find some people that would sign up. Nobody signed up. I couldn't believe it. In retrospect, I have to rationalize it in my own mind, "What happened?" At that point in time I couldn't understand it. We had to have—we did have, our association manager go to Franklin [High School], go to Garfield [High School], talk to the high school counselors of the seniors, point out to them we had an apprenticeship opening here for some Blacks and wouldn't they care to send some guys down. Nothing happened.

The first one that we got was through the Urban League. And the Urban League took a guy by the hand, after interviewing him, and then our association manager went with the Urban League man, I don't know who this guy was, and we literally stayed with him till he had completely signed up. That was the first one. But it took us nearly two years to get the first apprentice that was Black. And after that we got about three other men. And then the union balked [?about putting in memoriam?].

And that was right at the time when Tyree started getting involved in the Central Contractors Association and it was right at the time that the King County job shut down, that ultimately resulted in the Feds coming in and filing the lawsuit. Okay? Now where do you want me to go from there?

[00:04:15] **WILLIAM LITTLE:** Continue, [?I'm fine?]

[00:04:16] **DONALD:** One of the interesting things of the lawsuit was that the Electricians Joint Apprenticeship Committee was not made a part of the lawsuit. And they weren't because of what I just told you a few minutes ago, that we did have some Blacks in the program. The union was made a part of it because there were no union electricians, the only Blacks that they had in the program were those three that we had taken in, that were apprentices at the time. So unlike the other crafts that were involved, the apprenticeship program of the electricians was not named [in the lawsuit].

There were a couple other interesting things that the court ordered. The testimony indicated that the electricians had taken in other people and made them journeymen, that they had had only two days of training. There was evidence to this effect. That played a crucial part in the way the judge wrote the decision and I think it contributed to the extending time that it has taken to resolve the problem. No question about that evidence, I understand what it is, I don't know whether you understand what it was or not.

[00:05:40] **WILLIAM:** Oh, yes I do. I come out of a trade background, I was a [?pipefitter?] myself.

[00:05:43] **DONALD:** Do you understand the reason why the electricians and others took in, and others took them in for two years? It was organizing non-union shops, you see. They would go in and organize the shop, and in order to get the guys to go along with the vote, they would say, "We'll take you in as journeymen." So that is where, no question, the order was actually right. They had taken people in with less than two years experience, or two years of training.

As a result of the shut downs and continued pressure by the Central Contractors Association, the lawsuit was started and it progressed through. I didn't really follow it too much. I was uninvolved at that particular time, other than as it created labor stoppages, which didn't involve us on any particular job, so I was just kind of a by-stander.

I've been active in the Construction Council which is an organization of subcontractors, and material suppliers within the construction industry. So when the construction industry was asked to name two people to the Court Order Advisory Committee—two or three people, I guess—they wanted one to come from the sub-trades, so they picked me to come from the sub-trades and Glenn to come from the AGC [Associated General Contractors]. Of the General Contractors, the sub-trades were involved in the plumbers, the electricians, and the sheet metal, and the generals were more directly involved in the ironworkers and the equipment workers, although there was a separate consent decree on the equipment operators.

So anyway, that is how the Court Order Advisory Committee was set up, and I really think that the judge had a marvelous concept when he set it up, because as I have seen it operate, it has been the means of having people talk their problems out, their frustrations out, it's a means of the industry talking to your people that weren't knowledgeable about the industry, but they were very prejudice about their position and their rights and they knew what they wanted, but they didn't recognize the problems. And one thing that did end up, one very great thing I think was—well, there were slot of very good things that ended up, because I think that the advisory committee did recommend that the judge, and he did make any number of different changes or gave us the authority to make changes, to do things that aided the program very materially.

A year ago, when we converted the two year program to the regular four year programs, I think would not have been possible without all the meetings that COAC has had. Because by that time, it was clear to the minorities on that committee that the kids weren't getting trained in two years, and couldn't get trained in two years, and the kids themselves knew damn well that when they got out at the end of two years, they were not going to be in a position of competing with the others. So that there was—everybody by that time had worked down the emotions throughout, so they could look at it objectively and at the kids. So we were able to restructure the whole program by means of consent of the unions of management and labor, and the US attorney to get that restructured, which is the way it's operating now.

Now, you started asking about the use of UCWA [United Construction Workers Association]. Tyree [Scott] and the CCA got this thing started. And then Tyree—and I'm going by my judgment and my knowledge and my facts may be wrong, so don't hold me exactly to these particular facts. I think they're right in general—Tyree lost control of the Central Contractors Association. For why, I don't really know. And then he set up the UCWA as another organization. He has been very militant.

I think that some of the things that he has done have worked to the disadvantage of the guys that are in the program. Why? Because I think that the Blacks that were thrown into the program were in a bit of a strange environment and they had very divided loyalties, and because of some of the activities of UCWA, those loyalties were even further divided. He tried to make them dues paying members of the UCWA, the unions tried to make them dues paying members of the union. The court was involved in that in that they had certain rights, that they didn't really have to join the union, but for their own good they should have joined the union. There were a whole bunch of things tugging at them, I think that the UCWA's input in many aspects was detrimental to the program. I have got to recognize that probably, there wouldn't have been any program without him. So if you try to equate the whole thing, I'm picking a point at which Tyree knows that I disagree with him. He and I have had violent arguments across the table on this subject, and I have told him that I think that he is looking out for his own interests and he is not looking out for the interest of the kids. I think that Tyree knows where I

stand and I think I know where he stands. I respect him for what he has done, and I disrespect him for where I think that he has had a few shortcomings, and this is one of the areas.

[?Doing fine?]

[00:12:38] **WILLIAM:** [laughs] Do you?

[00:12:40] **DONALD:** Well, I don't know where you want me to go from here, or where you think you would like more information.

[00:12:46] **WILLIAM:** Well, not in any one place in particular, just a general overview of what you perceive and what you have observed in your environment during the whole process.

[00:12:56] **DONALD:** As I said, I think Judge Lindberg was prophetic in setting up the Advisory Committee. I can't imagine. You know it was very difficult, and very rough. We have had some very rough meetings, there have been all kinds of different arguments, but nevertheless we all came back and talked. And in the final result, I think we have a good working program. But still got some soft spots. The ironworkers aren't as good as lot, the sheet metal are not quite up to snuff, the plumbers are not quite up to snuff, the electricians have got the numbers in there and we have got them all employed, and I think that we are doing a pretty fair job. And the others are doing a pretty good job.

When we started, we had absolutely antagonism, absolute reluctance.

[00:13:56] **WILLIAM:** Let me talk about the industry, per se, the construction industry, per se. What was their response to the whole thing initiated by Tyree Scott, the whole actions?

[00:14:06] **DONALD:** Oh, absolutely dead set against it. Just felt that everything that Tyree did was detrimental to the construction industry. It was a threat to the construction industry. It was a threat to the unions, the unions in particular. I think the construction industry speaking management-wise recognized early that 11246 had something that had to be done. The place where the construction industry was too odd, was that on the one hand we had the order that said that you had to do it, and on the other hand we had a written agreement with the unions saying we'd hire their people. And we did not have the authority to negotiate the things out of there. There was no way.

Now, when the judge came along with his decision that gave us authority. And things didn't happen for [?pretty near?] a year. The judge got us, I was one of them, the construction industry up there and I tell ya, I have never, ever felt the authority of the U.S. Government as much as I did. That guy said, "You do it." And there wasn't a man in that room, there were about ten of us, that had the slightest doubt that that was what had to do. And he gave us the authority to assign these apprentices to various contractors. And we in the Electrical Association, assumed the responsibility for our people and took those electricians and we called the contractors and said, "Look it, you have got so many," and we assigned them all. Without that authority it would have been very difficult.

[00:15:44] **WILLIAM:** Let me [?hear you clearly?], the judge gave the electric—

[00:15:48] **DONALD:** No. The judge gave the contractors.

[00:15:52] **WILLIAM:** Electrical contractors?

[00:15:53] **DONALD:** The whole construction, the general contractors who were the party to the suit. The generals assigned to the electricians the job of doing it was the electricians. The same with the plumbing association, the same with the sheet metal. Just ‘cause we knew our people, we had the data on who was hiring people. We knew where we could put the people.

That was how the first major group got out. We had dribbled a few out until then. But it was a very slow process. But that judge was a frustrated individual. He made an order and it had not been obeyed. He called us in there to tell us that as far as he was concerned, it must be obeyed. He said, “What do you need from me in order to do it?” We told him we needed the authority to assign these people to contractors and he gave it to us. And we did.

[00:16:57] **WILLIAM:** Okay let's go back. Tyree suggests, or what he mentioned to me was that said that during some period in time, the order wasn't being carried out, they had assigned sixty people to the jobs.

[00:17:12] **DONALD:** That has been Tyree's position all along, and I have been on the opposite side of that fence. Maybe we were both right. We certainly have been pursued more actively because of Tyree's actively. But philosophically Tyree felt that we ought to put the guys in the program and we said, “We will only put the guys in the program that we can train and training involves so many hours of work and we will not put them in the program unless they are working.” And his idea was to flood—and others even now, I had lunch last week with Cal Boulding. You know who Cal is?

[00:18:00] **WILLIAM:** Yeah, I met with him already.

[00:18:02] **DONALD:** Cal has the same kind of a tendency. He says “I am concerned with your graduation.” And I said Cal, “I'm not concerned about the graduation. We've committed to keeping eighty-one in the program, and the court says that we have to graduate seventy-five, and we've graduated eight.” And eight plus the Black apprentices we have in the program, we have a total of eighty-one. Now, my theory is that as long as we keep eighty-one in the program, when we drop down four, we add four, or five. Within that limit, we're up and we're down, we're up and we're down, we are going to graduate trained people as fast as possible. And the revised order says, “as soon as possible.”

Cal is bothered by that “as soon as possible.” He sees in there the means that we [?slipped it?], so he would like some target dates, but the minute you set target dates, then you've got to flood the front end of the program in order to assure yourself, coming out the end, the minute that you flood the front end of the program you throw other people out of work. So it takes longer to get to the tail end by putting a lot in the front. We have had an attrition rate of about thirty percent. So mathematically, you put an extra thirty percent in, you will end up with the same. But you don't. Because right now we have eighty one guys working. If we put ten more in, we are going to have ten out of work. So we are going to rotate those ten, and everybody in the program is going to get those ten idiots out of work. And what happens is that the good ones are going to get the full work, but the mediocre ones are going to be the ones who turn over most rapidly, and they are going to be the guys to get the least work. So we told Cal, “We feel we can do a better job reviewing the applicants coming in and being sure that we are going to have people that are qualified mentally, physically, dexterity-wise, desire-wise, who look like they are going to graduate. And we can't by flooding the program at front end to assure ourselves that we are going to get something out the back end.”

Tyree's attitude was the other way around. That we have got to get guys in the program, we have got all kinds of people out there and we will just put them in. Well, those all kinds of people were all kinds of quality too. Some are good, we have some Black electricians, Black apprentices that have been very good, as good as anybody. We have also got some who didn't go to school or would get D's, failing , that are still in the program, and you

scratch your head, what are you going to do? What we are trying to do is turn out guys that are going to stay in the industry.

That's where Tyree and—it's a different philosophical approach. Maybe his approach was necessary to get the thing moving. And he is phased out now. Maybe he recognizes that there is little need now, although he still has an involvement with the electricians.

[00:21:32] **WILLIAM:** Let's see what else I need to know.

[00:21:43] **DONALD:** I have noticed very little reluctance on management, to train the people or complete acceptance of the fact..

[00:21:57] **WILLIAM:** Let's move on to another question that interests me, not only from a scholarship point of view but from a personal perspective, in terms of when you move into the foreman rank, how many Blacks do you have running jobs?

[00:22:10] **DONALD:** I don't think any. I don't think that we've got that many Black electricians That has to move on up as these apprentices get in and get out and graduate and get experience, then some of them will be foremen, no question about it.

[00:22:30] **WILLIAM:** That's always been a bone of contention with my father, he's a former plumber, and he always said it took ten years of his life. Ten good years of his life, without any compensation, [?that he could be retired by then?] , waiting for discrimination [inaudible] .

[00:22:51] **DONALD:** There's no question about what was there. You don't win court battles without being able to prove the fact, the very fact is that there were no Black electricians in there, and that is [?pretty fishy?] evidence.

[00:23:10] **WILLIAM:** So what do you think of the UCWA as an organization? Not Tyree himself, but the organization now.

[00:23:19] **DONALD:** I am really not that familiar with it now. Harley Bird was very instrumental in getting this program changed from the two years to the four years. I don't think that it would have been possible to do without him. I think that the U.S. Attorney John— [snaps fingers] Cal Boulding's predecessor, I forgot John's last name—I think he was very instrumental. It's pretty difficult for someone to come in, that hasn't been involved with as many years as he had at that point, and understand the difficulties of getting those programs revised. There's where I think the UCWA did a very worthwhile job. Harley was sensitive to the good of the overall program, as far as affecting the basic training of the Blacks involved. He had become convinced in all these meetings that we had—and I guess Tyree, because I don't think Harley would have acted if Tyree didn't approve—that they really did need four years training. And once they became convinced of that, here again was the interaction of the Court Order Advisory Committee. So instead of all those kids getting out—You have no idea of the number of hours that we spent talking about these things. It just doesn't happen overnight.

The first position of the minorities was that, look at, with special training we can teach Blacks to be electricians in two years. So we went through all the gambit of what kind of special training. And all these things have to be tried, have to be discussed, the minority people have to consider and think about it, come back and throw it at us again, and we have to react again, this goes over a period of a year's time or more before there is the acceptance, that yeah, these SOB's, they may just a little bit right, maybe we are going to have to take four years to train

Blacks, even if our desire says that we oughta be able to do it in two. But it's that kind of a bringing together of the problems and talking about them in a contemporary atmosphere.

Professor [Luvern] Rieke was given my job. I was chairman of the Advisory Committee to start in with. And we started to try to work a program for the whole industry, and we failed. I felt that many times we were very close to a solution, but that was in the CCA days still. We were not able to make it. I was much more authoritarian than Professor Rieke. Professor Rieke has done a marvelous job. I really appreciate what he has done and the judicial type of an administrative hand, a firm hand, he's had on everybody, yet completely understanding and listening to each party's input, and rephrasing it and restructuring it so that all of the parties understood where the differences were. It was a job that I would never do. I've been delighted to be a part of it. It has really been a very gratifying experience, all told.

[00:27:12] **WILLIAM:** Let me ask a question about the [?labor industry?] . I mean, you wouldn't know what went on inside internally, but you know what their position was when they tried to negotiate [?with the manuscript?] .

[00:27:28] **DONALD:** You mean prior to the court order?

[00:27:30] **WILLIAM:** No, during the court order. What types of discussion did occur after the Court Order Advisory Committee? Did any discussion occur outside of the formal arena of the Court Order Advisory Committee?

[00:27:53] **DONALD:** Practically none. There was a change after probably about three years, when Austin St. Laurent got off of the committee and Ed Olsen and Glenn Arnold got on. Now, I guess we have a new appointee to it, I haven't been to a meeting—I've been to a meeting, but they haven't been to a meeting, so I don't know who the new people are. Austin was quite abrasive and quite outspoken. Glenn Arnold was much more diplomatic, and Ed Olsen was a real gentleman. They didn't give up labor's position. Well, if you smile and call your opponent a son of a bitch, well you'll probably get away with it, but Austin didn't smile. There was a great antagonism between Austin and Tyree. When the other people came on, that antagonism was no longer a sensitive issue. It is very difficult [?to really?] talk about basics. Austin would lay it right on the line, and what he said was right, but he said it in such a way that it was a chip on the shoulder, and it created a negative reaction to everything as far as minorities were concerned.

[00:29:38] **WILLIAM:** Okay, how about the government's position in this whole affair? They had a central role, meaning the state government, and Joe [Tobin] told me—I used to work with Tobin, by the way—

[00:29:48] **DONALD:** I don't really think they had a central position. I think they tried to straddle the fence between labor and the minorities, and I don't think they were complicit with anything they did or said, other than just lending the presence of the government there and reacting. And the positive thing they did was to give specific instances and specific direction to what the state's factual apprenticeship program was. How the state council worked, how the indenture worked. Any time that we got into a hassle about what did happen, they were very good in attendance.

[00:30:32] **WILLIAM:** How about the county?

[00:30:34] **DONALD:** [?Pocker?] was about the same, possibly even less. They used to give us fits because the county pretty generally worked with the minorities. [laughs]

[00:30:51] **WILLIAM:** That's [?Pocker?] , that's my [?employer?]. [laughs]

[00:30:59] **DONALD:** I don't recall anything that developed as being super critical that would have made any difference in the quality of the work. But they were playing a political game, and they were working in the middle. I felt that my motivations was for the good of the guys who were getting in the program. I wanted trained people, I didn't want half trained people, I wanted people trained as best as we could train them. Because those were going to be my employees for many years.

[00:31:41] **WILLIAM:** Well, I've got to get out of here. I could go on for another couple hours, but—